

Weather Review: Louisiana, 2003

Louisiana's featured weather highlights for 2003 included El Niño winter conditions, a late spring drought, Tropical Storm Bill, and periods of heavy rainfall that were intermittent with spectacular weather in autumn. For the year in its totality, statewide temperature was slightly above normal, averaging 66.6 degrees.

Statewide precipitation averaged 52.73 inches, which is less than the long-term average of 60.14 inches. However, since annual values never tell the whole story, the month-by-month ups and downs of Louisiana's weather are highlighted below.

January: The state experienced one of the driest Januarys on record, averaging near 1 inch of precipitation. A run of Arctic outbreaks affected the state, which led to below normal temperatures. The most severe of these outbreaks produced a hard freeze (temperatures dipping to 28 degrees) for most of Louisiana, excluding the New Orleans metro area and extreme southeastern parishes.

February: In contrast to January, precipitation was well above normal, as more typical winter El Niño-like conditions were prevalent. El Niños tend to enhance storminess in the Gulf of Mexico, which was indicative of this month.

March: The first half of March started out wet, but the weather shifted to a drier pattern in the latter half of the month. There were also some last gasps of winter near the end of the month, with some passing cold fronts and chilly temperatures.

April: The month began with flooding rains in the northern parishes, but the remainder of the month was relatively dry.

May: Warm and dry conditions characterized this month. Statewide temperatures averaged three degrees above normal, while precipitation was less than half of normal. The statewide rainfall totals were low despite relatively wet conditions in the north-central and northeastern parishes. Near record dryness occurred in the south. Moderate drought existed in the southern parishes.

June: Persistent rainfall eliminated drought problems in southern Louisiana, while Tropical Storm Bill produced high winds along the Louisiana coast and very heavy rainfall in the southeastern parishes.

July: Typical summer weather dominated the month, complete with scattered thundershowers and the threat of a tropical storm.

August: Highlights this month include NWS Heat Advisories on the sixth and seventh due to temperatures in the mid to upper 90 degrees, and Heat Index Values ranging from 100 to 110 degrees. Tropical Storm Grace, which made landfall along the Texas Coast, produced heavy rains in parts of western Louisiana.

September: A series of tropical systems formed in the Gulf, but there was little impact. A series of fronts and a taste of fall weather dominated this month.

October: Despite above normal rainfall in south-central and southeastern Louisiana, October was the driest month of the year. It was also perhaps the most pleasant and comfortable.

November: Heavy rains were produced mid-month that exceeded six inches for many locations in the central and north-central parishes. Also, the state experienced its first fall freeze on November 24th (north) and 25th (south). November temperatures exceeded normal by nearly four degrees; the largest departure of the year.

December: A relatively dry and cool December only accentuated delightful weather on Christmas Day.